

## NASAL CONGESTION AND SINUSITIS

### NASAL CONGESTION

#### What is Nasal Congestion and Why does it Happen?

Nasal Congestion is often called **rhinitis** (inflammation of the nasal passages) by doctors however rhinitis is only one kind of nasal congestion which occurs for a number of reasons.

When the nose and it's adjacent tissues and blood vessels become swollen with excess fluid it partially or fully blocks the nose.

Sometimes but not always, there is accompanying mucous discharge or a runny nose.

Nasal congestion is caused by **anything that irritates or inflames the nasal tissues**. Infection as a result of a cold, flu or sinusitis, and allergies are frequent causes of nasal congestion and a runny nose.

A congested and runny nose can also be caused by irritants such as smoke, car exhaust and other pollutants.

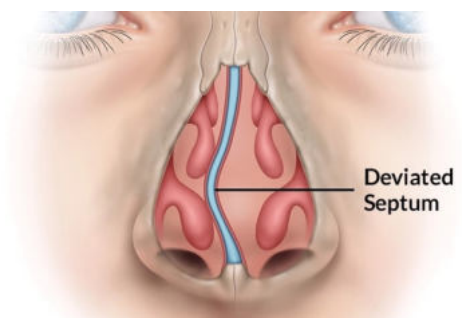
What is less well-known is that **a blocked nose is one of the most common signs of habitual over-breathing**.

Over-breathing causes:

- dehydration of the airways
- irritation and inflammation, blockage
- constriction of smooth muscle lining the nasal passages
- greater risk of infection from prolonged blockage of the nasal passages and sinuses
- potential nasal obstruction from a deviated septum (crooked midline cartilage and bone)
- enlarged turbinates or polyp growth

If the nose is obstructed as a result of a deviated septum (crooked cartilage and bone that divides the two nostrils), it can cause some blockage on one side.

A deviated septum can be a result of incorrect mouth breathing when young and/or as a result of trauma to the nose from an accident. This rarely prevents nasal breathing even if it is more difficult.



Many people have a deviated nasal septum without realising it unless they have been to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist or otolaryngologist at some point.

This likely explains why the nasal (PCR) COVID-19 swabs have been a lot more uncomfortable for some individuals than others.

Often we see people in the clinic who have developed nasal polyps<sup>1</sup> which can cause congestion.

Swollen turbinates<sup>2</sup> (usually the inferior turbinates) are often mistakenly called polyps because an increased blood supply or thickness of the mucosa in these turbinates also causes nose blockage. It is generally believed that these develop as a result of inflammation from asthma and allergies for example and/or repeated infections or sensitivities.

### What Can You Do If You Suffer from Nasal Congestion Yourself?

Often surgery is recommended to remove polyps or trim swollen turbinates. Unfortunately the turbinates are your nose filters and humidifiers, so if the inferior turbinates are trimmed, this also reduces the protection the turbinates afford. It is in our best interests to protect them!

At Breathe Free Clinic we believe that poor breathing can be the cause of asthma and inflammation which causes nasal congestion. This offers the potential to reduce or even prevent swelling altogether without the need for surgery polyp or turbinate or even adenoid surgery.

Restoring carbon dioxide and nitric oxide levels to healthy levels calms and soothes the membrane tissue of the nose and relaxes and dilates smooth muscle lining the sinuses which enable the nose to be less inflamed or constricted.

So the good news is that **you can reduce airway irritation and inflammation or constriction without the need for nasal sprays** when you **learn to breathe correctly** with the Breathe Free Clinic programme.

Although breathing retraining quickly relieves nasal congestion in most cases by normalising your breathing rate and volume, it can take 2 to 3 months of dedicated and regular breathing practice to reduce severe polyps, with surgery only a final recourse.

Learn how to **naturally decongest** or unblock your nose using the simple **Nose Unblocking Exercise** below. It is also useful to determine whether you have any physical blockage.

The nose often clears after doing this once or twice and should clear after four or five times at most. If not it may pay to have your nose checked by a specialist.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Polyyps** are benign inflamed sinus mucosa which have enlarged slowly to not only fill the sinus cavities but have also enlarged into the nasal passage causing blockage. They are not usually seen in children.

<sup>2</sup> **Turbinates** are part of the structure of the side wall of the nose. There are three on each side - inferior, middle and superior - formed of bone covered with mucosa (moist tissue). The lower (inferior one) is a reservoir of blood that humidifies and warms the air that comes through the nose, and usually has thicker mucosa. for that reason.

## Nose Clearing Exercise

1. After breathing normally (do not make any exaggerated breathing manoeuvre) breathe in and out through your nose.
2. Close your nostrils gently with finger tips after exhaling.
3. Hold your breath for as long as is comfortable and then gradually resume very gentle breathing through your nose.



### Tips

- Try nodding your head while holding the breath to increase blood flow to the sinuses.
- Keep your mouth closed throughout the exercise and do not hold so long that you are forced to gasp air in through your mouth at the end.
- If your nose is completely blocked, you can breathe in and out gently through pursed lips.
- In stubborn cases when your nose is blocked, for example due to a cold, you may have to repeat the exercise a few times.
- It is important to be able to control the breathing within 3 breathes after the hold. Otherwise the body blows off accumulated CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) and may even make the problem worse. If this is not possible then next time reduce the length of the hold as necessary.

Holding your breath helps to raise CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the nasal passages which soothes nasal membrane tissue and reduces inflammation. Gentle nodding helps to increase circulation to the sinuses.

### When Not to Use

If you have a serious medical problem such as cardiovascular disease or suffer from panic attacks or you are pregnant, we do not recommend using this method.

## SINUSITIS

Sinusitis is also **inflammation or swelling**, but **of the tissue lining the sinuses**. Sinuses are hollow spaces usually filled with air, within the bones between your eyes, behind your cheekbones, and in your forehead.

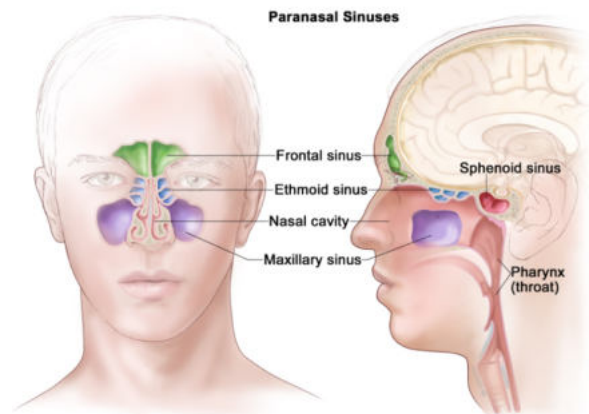
When healthy, the sinuses make thin (watery) mucus, which keeps the inside of your nose moist and is drained by small channels that link the sinuses. That, in turn, helps to remove and protect against dust, allergens, and pollutants.



When the sinuses get blocked or filled with fluid it can cause bacterial growth causing an infection even when you don't have a cold or flu in the first instance.

Just as healthy nasal breathing can minimize symptoms of nasal congestion, so too can it relieve sinusitis.

Healthy nasal breathing not only improves CO<sub>2</sub> levels but also nitric oxide. Nitric oxide (NO) is a natural anti-bacterial antifungal, anti-viral gas.



When both NO and CO<sub>2</sub> are a healthy concentration in the sinuses as a result of healthy breathing it offers disease protection for your lungs and helps to reduce inflammation.

Check out this article on the benefits of Nitric oxide written by colleagues Nicky McLeod and Glenn White: <https://www.buteykobreathing.nz/blog/potential-immune-protective-effects-nitric-oxide-and-humming>

Learning to breathe well will help you to stay decongested naturally.

Find out more by booking in for a **Breathing Assessment** or **Contact the Breathe Free Clinic** for more information.